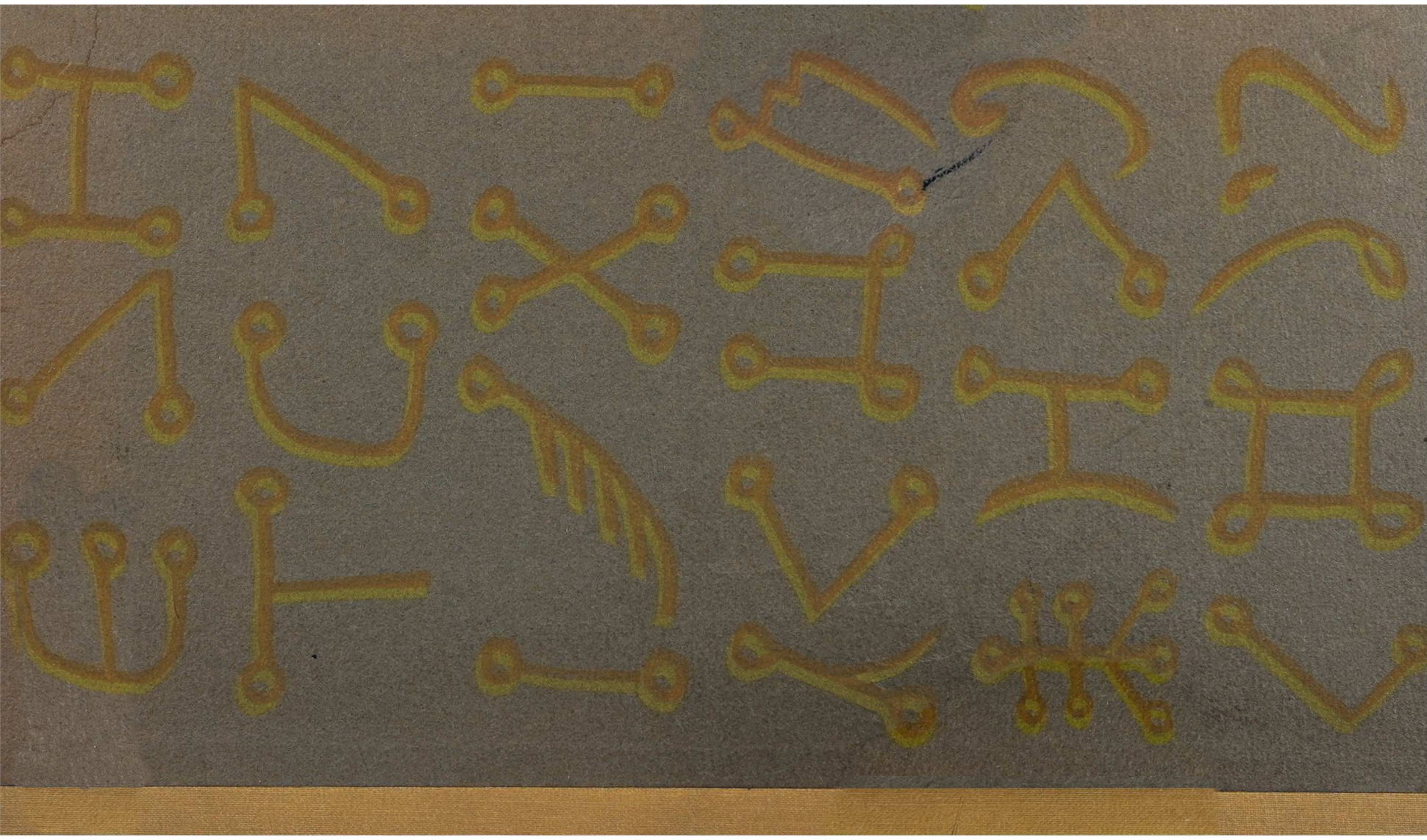
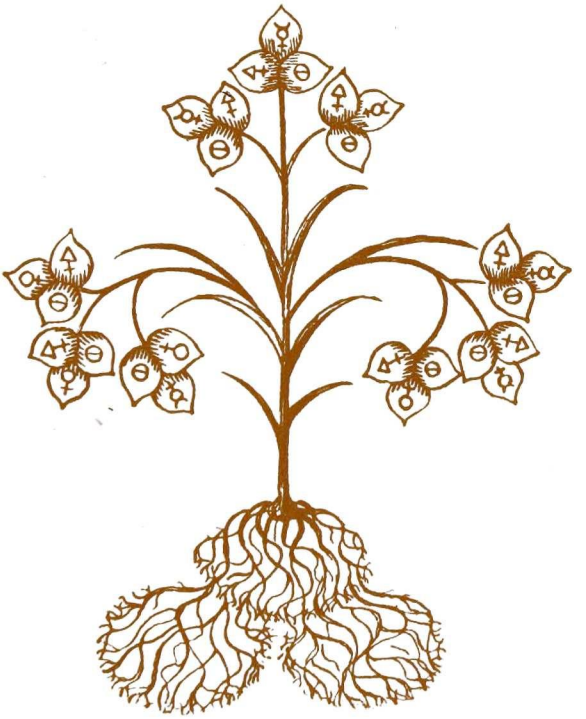


Man's art offers the gift of music out of mere sound, of wisdom out of awareness, of love out of indifference. There are difficult transmutations. They are accomplished by the alchemy of only the purest motivation. There must be an utter selflessness in the process. The ego of the creative individual must identify itself with the universal conscience such is the matrix of all high creativity. The universal conscience may be described or defined in one aspect as a drive toward maturity.

Richard Guggenheimer
Creative Vision

ALCHEMY
as a way of salvation

FREDERIC SPIEGELBERG



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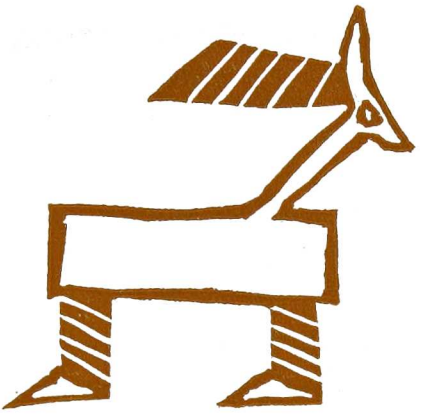


1. IS ALCHEMICAL ACTION POSSIBLE?

"This is true without doubt, certain and very sure: What is Below is like that which is Above. And which is Above is like which is Below. Thereby can the mysterious activity of everything be explained. And just as all things have been created by One according to the plan of One, thus all things are derived from this One by way of adoption.

"Its Father is the Sun, its Mother the Moon. The Wind carried it in its belly, its nurse is the Earth. It is the origin of all perfectness in the entire World; its power is complete, if it has become Earth.

"Divide the Earth from the Fire, the fine from the coarse, without tenseness and with mighty reason. It ascends from Earth, and gains the strength from the Above as well as of the Below. In this way you will possess the splendor of all the world; therefore all darkness will flee from you. That is the strong power of all powers, that triumphs over all subtle things and penetrates all firmness. In this way the world has been created and those are the miraculous affinities, whose ways have herewith been shown.

"Therefore I am called Hermes Trismegistos, the threefold Great one, who possesses the threefold wisdom of all the world. This finishes what I have said about the work of the Sun . . ."

The foregoing is a translation of the "Tabula Smaragdina." We can hardly imagine the enormous importance of those few sentences for the thinking of many centuries. It may well be that throughout the history of mankind no other single text has ever caused so much speculation as these dark words have.

Even today many movements called Occultism or Pansophy or Biosophy and most of the magic of the Middle Ages, astrology and palmistry have their origin in the last analysis, in the Tabula Smaragdina of Hermes Trismegistos. It has been a talisman, guiding the religious experiences and the philosophical views of many generations of men who considered themselves "Initiates," because in their longing and yearning they had found an awareness of the Miracle of Being, far beyond the usual dream state consciousness, in which the masses manage to take existence for granted and as a mere matter of course.

We know nothing about the origin of the Tabula Smaragdina or about that Hermes who is unanimously called its author. Even in the Middle Ages we find the doubt expressed that such a long text could ever have been written on a smaragd. However, it appears that in antiquity all stones of intensely green colour were called smaragd. Plinius e.g. reports that the Emperor Nero because of his weak eyes used to watch the displays in the sun-flooded circus arena always through a "smaragd" – thus the term Tabula Smaragdina may well refer to another kind of stone.

Gods always write on stone and not on perishable

material. The Israelitic Tables of Testimony which Moses brought down from the mountain to his people had been "written with the finger of God" (Exodus 31, 18). The Koran too has been called "a glorious Koran written on well preserved stone tablets" (Sure 85, 22), and Nebuchadnezzar mentions in an edict the Babylonian Stone Tablets of Destiny.

Arabic historians tell about an extremely old Egyptian temple, in which the statue of Aphrodite was kept underneath a cupola of red sulphur and surrounded by stones and metals. At the feet of the goddess, so they say, was a statue of Hermes made of Smaragd, presenting him in a sitting position and reading to the goddess from the book of wisdom.

Who, then, was this Hermes, the threefold glorious one? Was he a god, a man, or both? The Greeks translated Thot, the Ibis-headed Egyptian god of wisdom into Hermes, just as later the Romans accepted the Greek Hermes as their Mercury.

Thot – Hermes – Mercury; they are related by being all guardians of the souls in the underworld and at the same time by being the keepers of secret wisdom. They watch the gates at the borderline between life and death, waking and dreaming, and finally they are all three the patrons of secret science and of the art of writing.

Thot – Hermes is the great magician who keeps the keys to all the hidden treasures of wisdom, and who knows the spells by whose help man can attain the wealth of his subconscious depths.

Besides the God Hermes there is Hermes, a holy King of the remote past, who had the vision of events to come and built the pyramids to hide and preserve the sacred books and tablets of knowledge in their treasure-cham-

bers throughout the days of the deluge.

Because of this old Arabic tradition, one of the Caliphs tried in 832 to open up one of the great pyramids "with fire and acids," but he did not succeed.

Besides the God Hermes and the ruler in the past who had the same name, there must have been an author by that name who can hardly have lived earlier than in the third century A. D. who composed or compiled the great hermetical scriptures, the so-called Codex Hermeticus.

These scriptures contain anything but Christian doctrine, yet we find a return of the great Hermes in early Middle Age folklore as St. Hermes, a Christian Saint and church patron.

Thus Hermes has become a symbolical name for the transmission of hidden wisdom, a name attributed throughout the millenniums to ever new divine, half-divine and human beings, a name that was applied whenever mankind felt enriched through revelations of formerly undisclosed knowledge.

To Hermes, who is generally considered the father of alchemy in the Western world, corresponds Nagarjuna in India. It seems strange that this Nagarjuna, too, is such a continuously recurring name that it is almost impossible for historical research to arrive at a date for that particular Nagarjuna who is said to have seen the alchemical secrets in dream-visions.

What we call alchemy is not only a Western phenomenon. We can find throughout mankind the attempt to produce gold through artificial transformation of matter and to discover a potion of longevity. We find such alchemical attempts among the ancient Mexicans, among Negro tribes in Central Africa, and in China as well as on Pacific islands.

The History of Alchemical World-Literature has not yet been written. It would have to be a very extensive volume, for the amount of alchemical scriptures is enormous and very likely larger than the voluminous writings of officially recognized churches and schools.

Everything belonging to Hermetic wisdom has been treated first of all as heretical and then as superstitious by the official representatives of the Church and is nowadays usually called a dangerous subcurrent of the History of Religion. And rightly so;because alchemical, magical doctrines penetrate, wherever they arise, deep into folklore and settle particularly in subconscious realms which normally are only accessible in dreams.

We should beware, however, of underestimating the importance of this occult wave; these deep currents are frequently rapid and strong and in the long run far more powerful than visible surface movements.

Glancing over the uncharted wealth of alchemical literature we may well be stunned in the face of such a tremendous jungle of ideas and may feel actually in danger of being devoured by its swamps or of being carried away by unchecked waves of insanity. How far all this seems from the ethereal clarity and the logical reasoning of contemporary systems of official theology!

However, let us be careful! Perhaps the language of dogmatists in theology and philosophy was just as stubborn and far-fetched in their age. But theological language has been studied and transmitted throughout the centuries, while the language of Alchemists has been so long suppressed and neglected in medieval studies that the meaning of its vocabulary has almost been forgotten.

Even the Alchemists themselves have aided this tendency to obscurity. The theologians and philosophers

usually suffered from the inadequacy of their own language and its limited expressiveness, but the Alchemists, on the other hand, enjoyed the darkness of their language and increased it deliberately, in order to keep their insights secret and inaccessible to profane onlookers.

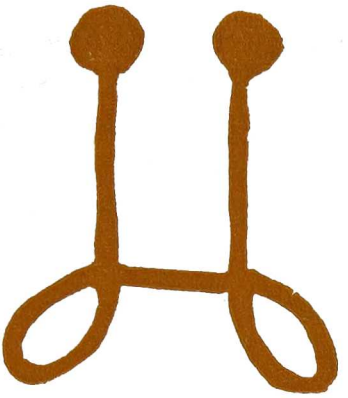
Thus we cannot be surprised to find that, as a result, the masses of the uninitiated declared the alchemical doctrines nonsense, and that secular science turned completely away from them. The very term "Alchemy" was finally identified with those external arts, which the true Alchemists had always considered as shameful pseudo-alchemy. Modern science generally tells us that the only good that ever came out of Alchemy has been its replacement by the true science of chemistry as an exact discipline for real knowledge, on the basis of which our modern technological age has developed.

That means that one considers Alchemy as nothing more than the Mother of Chemistry, after the advent of which, Alchemy completely lost its meaning and right to existence.

Let us try, for once, to turn the argument against the aggressor. We may say that alchemy was a divine science concerned with the ultimate mysteries of reality, attempting a transformation of matter and of all being into a higher form of existence.

What later on chemistry substituted for this cult was at bottom only a by-product of the real process and nothing but the all too secular misunderstanding of a holy purpose.

The true mother of chemistry is not alchemy, but rather the pseudo-alchemy of the cauldron-cooks. For chemistry, just like the older misinterpretations of alchemy, is concerned only with matter and not with the soul.



2. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PURPOSELESS ACTIONS

Most of the things we do have no purpose. We may find this statement too sweeping, but before dismissing it indignantly, let us consider first whether we really do or do not waste a great deal of time and energy on mere trifles. Very often we know quite well that we do, but in many cases we delude ourselves and act as if we are engaged in something useful, when in point of fact our actions are quite purposeless. That does not mean that we should do things always with a consciousness of purpose. Preaching of that sort will help no one. On the contrary, such an artificial and forced utilitarianism would inevitably lead to a completely cramped attitude to life. People who know exactly what they are doing, and who have considered and calculated every single thing in advance, are not exactly the most agreeable or most cheerful of our fellow-beings.

Such firm heroes of purpose, however, do not exist. Every one of us has been a child at some time and as a child one does everything without asking what advantage or utility it has. Fortunately, we do not quite lose

this child-like state in later life. There is probably no one who would maintain that a child makes sand-pies so as to obtain training for a future profession as pastry-cook. Nor does anyone seriously believe that we go walking in fields and forests where we can find nothing utilitarian, purely in order to exercise our lungs and stimulate the circulation of our blood, so that we may gather strength for ordinary utilitarian activities.

From all this we see that there is obviously something in life apart from mere utility; no matter what philosophers may claim to be the aim of human existence, it is by no means the only or the most important driving force in our life. It is wrong to inquire what the purpose of picking flowers is. We do not do such things to attain to something existing behind them, but for their own sakes. We certainly do not indulge in the habit of twiddling our thumbs as a gymnastic finger exercise to preserve the flexibility of our digits.

Let us admit then, that our life is not always devoted purely to utility. Let us free ourselves from this false fear of everything that cannot prove itself useful to our rational judgment. Why should we not be satisfied, if our innermost feeling, our "instinct," approves and likes to do a thing although to our intelligence it seems to be a useless game?

We can see this clearly in the Indian Raja-Yoga, as taught in the Bhagavadgita. Here the voice of the Lord instructs us that man's chief concern is to free himself from the constant desire for success and profit from his actions, – that he must fulfill his duty, his tasks, here in this life without thinking of a reward for his good works. Actions that have no motive of gain, that are done purely for their own sake, alone lead to salvation. Is there, then,

a meaning in purposeless actions?

Before we can answer this question we must first glance at the mode of conducting religious ceremonials, such as is usual in most religions. Thus, in the altar-service of the Catholic Church much time is taken up by ceremonial gestures; books are carried from left to right, vestments are put on and then taken off, vessels are brought and solemnly accepted, body movements are performed, knees are bent, heads lowered, hands clasped together, candles are lit and then extinguished, incense-burners are swung and holy water sprinkled. And all this takes place without any palpable gain, without any visible aim. These actions are obviously meaningful in themselves, even without "anything resulting thereby." Yet it must give us cause to reflect when we see, for instance, the learned monks of the Benedictine order spending several hours every day in carrying out the details of the Mass as correctly as possible.

This and similar religious ceremonials have been performed throughout the whole world for centuries. Long before man consciously reflected upon the Godhead, he honoured It by sacrificial ceremonies. The custom of making sacrifices which is widespread in the history of religion, does not really signify, as the name usually leads us to believe, an offering of valuable things to the Divine Being who has demanded them and would be angry without them. Rather it is that man, by performing the "sacrifice" and all the actions connected with it, tries himself to act as an almost divine creative personality. The world, as it lies before us, is still raw material and has not been quite completed; it must be brought to completion; that which it lacks must be supplied, and in this way it will be made a fit habitation for human life.

Collaboration in the divine creation of the world — that is the meaning of most of the religious cults and ceremonies. There is no other purpose, no striving for any reward behind them, but much, much more: the desire of men to become God-like. No man, not even a primitive man, is prepared to recognize the world as completed and to accept it as it is. Man seeks to measure himself with the gods and their power; he constantly wants to prove to himself and to others that he also has creative power, or at least magical power.

All this is shown by the fact that no normal person succeeds in being always idle and in living without productive activity. No one is satisfied with himself or with life, who cannot employ his powers and feel that he is active and creating. The mere enjoyment of existing beauties cannot really satisfy us, and in the same way we will not be content with understanding and penetrating the world and life merely with our minds. All knowledge becomes a true possession for us only if we employ it and can grasp it bodily.

In the development of human culture, the period of religious sacrifice was gradually succeeded by philosophical reflection. Instead of trying to make himself master of the world by ceremonial actions, man now sought to conquer it by thought. Instead of trying to project himself into the fullness of earthly existence with the whole of his spiritual and bodily being, he sought to do it only with his mind, that is to say, to comprehend it with only a part of the human entity. This, in the long run, could not be sufficient. Protest was raised against it quite early and resulted in man turning from a partial consideration to the whole once again.

Alchemy developed as the attempt to master the mate-

rial side of earthly existence; it was a philosophizing with the hand, instead of merely with the head; a perception through the body, instead of merely through the mind; an artificial process of world creation in the retort.

Our so-called "purposeless actions," that is to say, everything we do without any utilitarian aim, are a misunderstood result of alchemistic activity. Every art that is pursued today for its own sake instead of having some aim in view, is at bottom an heir of alchemy.

The significance of our purposeless actions, therefore, can only be grasped if we know something about alchemy. And conversely, our own purposeless actions can serve as a connecting link if we now proceed to examine the aims and activities of the alchemists.

3. THE MYSTERY OF THE BIRTH OF MATTER

THE GODS MADE THE WORLD out of the body of a slain dragon, — so say the myths of most peoples. The substance of that world in which we live was first produced in its present form in the prehistoric struggles of gods and demons. First there was chaos, then arose the cosmos, the planned universe.

Mythical tales of this sort are really concerned with man and his nature, and not with gods, devils, heaven and earth. But the sagas cannot describe the origin of man in their own language, except as a struggle between lower and higher powers.

In the same way the alchemists are really concerned with the soul and its development, and not with material gold or quicksilver. But they cannot experience the rise of the inner powers of the soul except in matter and its transformation in the retort. It is not the fact that our body has a soul that seems to them wonderful or noteworthy, but the contrary: the fact that our soul has a body, a body formed from matter, from water, fire and metallic substances, is for them the greatest of miracles,

worthy to be venerated and to serve as the basis of a religion – the religion of alchemy.

No inner process of development, no thought or feeling is regarded by the alchemist as complete so long as it remains only in the sphere of the soul. Our thinking and striving become reality only when they appear corporeally in matter, and lead to the transformation of outwardly visible, palpable earthly figures. "His power is complete when it has become earth," says the Tabula Smaragdina. That the earth is there, that things are tangible and given us in a definite material form, that life is subject to inexorable laws of nature which no god or spirit may violate: this certainly is the real foundation of alchemy.

It does not seek for the doubtful miraculous phenomena of an occasional breach of the laws of nature, or for an incorporeal existence of a spiritual entity. It is not at all interested in spirits as free as the air, or in angelic beings without bodies and without palpable existences. Alchemy means examining and experiencing the miraculousness of matter and of the earth. It does not seek a World Beyond of purely spiritual beings, but the "stone" in all its hardness and reality.

This explains the interest of the alchemists in the origin of the external world. They know from experience that nothing real can arise from nothing, but that a substance can only be formed from another by transformation. Therefore they refer to those myths of creation in the history of religion which tell how divine powers formed heaven and earth from the corpse of some original demon or demoness. In these sagas it appears that the substance of our world is in essence black, of demoniac quality, and that it requires a transformation-process to purify it and

lead it towards the light. Alchemy seeks to achieve this process. "Separate the earth from fire, the fine from the coarse," says the Tabula Smaragdina. The gods also, so the Indian myths tell, once busied themselves in this way as alchemists.

In order to obtain the Elixir of Life, they decided to churn up the World Ocean, the Sea of Milk, so that the life-juice it contained would be deposited as solid masses of butter. The mighty World-mountain was uprooted, the World-serpent used as a rope to tie around it, and then the gods and the demons pulled at its head and tail for centuries, thus churning up the Sea of Milk with the World-mountain. During this process animals and plants fell from the mountain into the sea. Through the vital power of these things the fluid mass finally coagulated into a cream, the living things in it caused it to ferment, and Ambrosia resulted – the intoxicating drink which filled everyone with eternal life and power. The juice of every plant of the earth had flowed into it, and as the churning went on, the creamy essence of the whole Universe solidified as butter on the surface of the ocean. There resulted the creation of the new substance of a new world!

The forces of life arose from the sea as symbolical figures; shining brightly and decked in white, the moon lifted itself from out of the flood; the Goddess of Happiness and Beauty, the Goddess of Intoxication, the pale-coloured horse of the flight of thought and the Tree of Desire of the Blessed came forth.

But no alchemistic process takes place without danger or without dark, poisonous by-products. Whilst the Elixir of Life was forming on the surface and a new, bright world was arising, a fearful fire raged in the depths of the

sea which threatened to darken and poison everything with its fumes. It burst forth from the middle of the sea, bluish-black, fiery, gigantically filling the space between the worlds. Snakes and insects, and poisons of every kind sprang from it in masses, and the beings who glimpsed this horror dissolved to nothing through terror.

The original envy and hatred of beings took shape in this fiery poison and then also threatened the highest of the gods, just after the actual success of the churning of the Sea of Milk was in sight and immortality and all blessings seemed to have been gained. Shrinking with fear, the gods turned to Shiva, the foremost and most dread god, the Lord also of death and demonism. They reached his lofty mountain home and told him of their sorrows and of their impotence in face of the Evil Thing that they themselves had called into existence. Where, they asked, would come their succour from the dark power of their own will? How could they hope to share in the Light and Salvation of the alchemistic Elixir-preparation without being destroyed by the dangers of the process? Only Shiva could help them. He, the invincible, who was exalted above all differences of night and day, of light and darkness, good and evil, descended and drank the dark, burning poison out of his left hand.

After that, the churning of the sea was cheerfully continued and the Elixir of Life obtained. The divine physician kept it in a white shell, the gods enjoyed it, and filled with strength, then conquered all the demon hordes. The dark powers of the depths had to hide themselves in the Sea of Salt Water. The World-mountain was then set in its place, in the midst of a renewed, transformed world.

The substance from which the world was made, has dark matter within it, alongside the light. This is stated

also in the "Sunflower of the Philosophers," a late alchemistic writing: "The substance from which our stone will be prepared is a simple unimportant thing, despised, since not the least beauty can be discerned in it. It is precisely the substance from which God in the beginning created heaven and earth, namely out of chaos and clods. Take these clods and treat them just as God did in the beginning, in the creation of heaven and earth."

We must transform the earth, purify and clarify the substance. We cannot indeed do this like the gods, that is to say, create an entirely new Universe and, as it were, achieve the transformation by churning the original sea. We can carry out the work assigned to us only on a small scale. We can purify and change ourselves. But even that, according to alchemist ideas, cannot take place as a purely inner, spiritual process, but only through working on the substance. We renew ourselves only by changing the things around us. The alchemist must, as it were, take his Ego in his hands; he must feel it in the substance with which he is dealing. He must identify himself in feeling with the materials which he is preparing and which he boils and melts. Then by succeeding with his alchemistic work, by producing the "stone," his Ego will also achieve a higher and better form.

Every process of transformation must take place in silence, away from the bustle of the outside world. The maturing must take place without disturbance. Therefore, the myths tell us, the germinating world was enclosed in an eggshell and was hatched out by the divine powers before it came to birth. For the same reason, every man who feels a strong inner development going on within him, feels the need of cutting himself off from society, and of becoming what he is to become in seclusion and

isolated tranquillity.

The alchemist, too, separates the substance which he wishes to transform, from the rest of the world. He puts it into a retort and "hatches" it by the heat of a stove. The apparatus of an alchemist is, as it were, the protective egg-shell, the body of his will to transform.

4. THE MYSTERY OF TRANSFORMATION

We must always distinguish in life between what we really want, and what we think and say we want. No one in the world knows himself so well as to have a proper idea of his own innermost desires.

What the alchemists really wanted we have already tried to explain, but if we question the alchemists themselves, then we get an entirely different answer. The Arabic writer Fihrist tells us that a certain prince of the Ummeiad Dynasty was the first Arabic alchemist. This prince himself states that the real aim of his alchemistic arts was the attainment of wealth and power, and such did indeed remain the outwardly visible driving-force of alchemistic work throughout the centuries.

The shoemaker Jakob Boehme, the great Protestant Mystic, saw behind this greed for power and money the real meaning of alchemy in the hermetical purification of all being. In a letter of 1622 he wrote to an alchemist who was obviously not quite clear about the deeper meaning of his research, the following sentences:

"The master should not wish, therefore, to concern

himself with gold or minerals, it is all false; it requires the very best in heaven and in the world, of above and below, of that which is far and near; the abode is everywhere to be found, but not everyone is fitted for it; nor does it cost money, nor has it anything to do with time and the nourishment of the body, otherwise anyone could prepare it for two guilders or less. The world must again be transformed into heaven and the heaven into world."

There can be no clearer statement of what the true alchemist must seek behind all the greed and bustle for gold. It is the retrogressive wandering of our powers of will and thought which strive upwards and then, enriched by the forces of the higher reality, must again descend into the hard substance of this world of ours below. "It ascends from earth to heaven and then descends to earth, thus acquiring the power above and the power below" (Tabula Smaragdina).

The meaning and mystery of life do not lie visibly on the surface; they must be discovered by effort, by a journey above or below. The old Persian ascends to heaven in order to conquer immortality and light in the spheres above the clouds. The Egyptian, on the other hand, descends into the underworld of the tombs to achieve the same purpose.

The alchemist feels heaven and underworld to be in himself; he makes his substances and liquids rise and fall in his apparatus, simmer and cool, and simultaneously feels his own powers of soul make corresponding movements and condense into a new and higher state.

After all, man himself is Nature's best and most important laboratory where the purification and sublimation of earthly matter is in process. Such is the doctrine of Manichaeism, the religious system of the Persian Mani,

who lived in the third century A. D., and died by crucifixion. Light, so taught Mani, shone into the darkness and dissolved itself in it, wasting itself upon it. Through this it lost its original strength and became more and more swallowed up by the elements of darkness and evil. In order to save it, man was created as a helper by the messenger of the Supreme God of Light, so that by his living and striving he should gather together again the scattered, powerless particles of light and lead them upwards.

Without knowing it, therefore, we are God's fellow-workers in the redemption of the world and the liberation of the good. This is accomplished in us and through us, for our whole spiritual and bodily being is a distilling apparatus. The food that we consume contains mingled within it the forces of heaven and hell, of light and darkness. Through the digestive process it is split up into its different constituents. The dark strives towards the earth; the light, however, is transformed in us into spiritual power and good thoughts, which ascend to the bright, Divine Being.

God Himself practices alchemy. According to this view He carries out a distillation process in which He uses our body as a retort. These ideas of Manichaeism became astonishingly widespread throughout the Christian world; but they also penetrated far into the East and influenced Persian, Islamic, Indian, Tibetan and Chinese philosophy to a very high degree.

One can almost say that alchemy is the practical side, the religious ceremonial of the Manichaeian religion, for wherever in the world the doctrines of Mani, which we have just described, made their way, we see simultaneously the appearance of alchemy.

5. THE CIRCULATION OF LIQUIDS

MAN PRACTICES ALCHEMY with the substances and secretions of his own body; that is very clearly to be seen from the methods developed by Manichaeism in combination with Indian Yoga-practices and Chinese nature-mysticism.

Mani did not think much of Nature and its laws. He considered it to be diabolical, therefore he thought it was pernicious for men to follow the course of Nature. Man could rather fulfill his task only if he went backwards along the path of world-creation by bending and deflecting the force of Nature. From conceptions such as these arose a whole system of alchemistic working on the human body. In the western world the work of purifying matter was begun by smelting stones and metals in an oven heated by the application of fire. In the eastern world, however, the alchemistic process of purification was begun in the substance of the human body itself; here attempts were made to stop and divert the natural streams of liquids and forces. The inner fire of life was used as the impulse for the transformation of matter.

This method had already been developed in the 8th century in Chinese alchemy. An ancient book describes how one must regulate one's breath and seminal flow so that the most important forces of life shall not stream away uselessly, or perhaps even dangerously, but shall in some way be able to find use as the driving impulse for the process of transforming our Ego and our material selves.

In the author's book "Hatha-Yoga," it is described in detail how a person versed in Yoga makes the essential force of the breath in the interior of his body ascend, and how finally breath and life-consciousness force their way out at the highest point of the head, over the bodily frame, and glow upwards into the upper world as a flame of the soul.

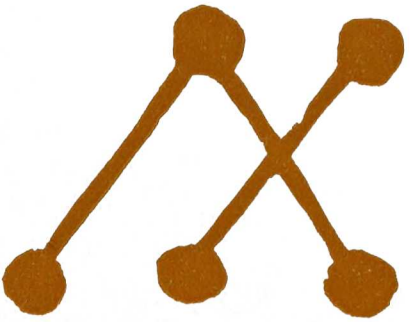
It is characteristic that the same idea has also happened to express itself, in a pictorial manner, in the occult thought of the western world. The pentecostal flame which is often represented in old paintings and church-windows over the heads of the disciples gathered around Jesus, is in form an illustration of the highest Yoga aim.

In the ancient Chinese text referred to, the retrogressive movement of the seminal flow is also taught, in addition to the transformation of the breathing process. It says:

"The meaning of this doctrine rests entirely upon the retrogressive method. The heart of man stands under the sign of fire. The flame of the fire strives upwards. If the two eyes regard the things of the world, then this is a looking that is directed outwards. If, then, we close our eyes and reverse our glance, then that is the retrogressive method. The force of sexuality stands under the sign of water. When the desires are active, then it flows down-

wards, directed outwards and taking effect outside. If at the moment of release it is not allowed to flow out, but is conducted back by the power of thought so that it forces its way upwards into the vessel of the creative part of us and refreshes and nourishes heart and body, then that is likewise the retrogressive method. Therefore it is said: The idea of the Elixir of Life rests entirely upon the retrogressive method."

From close and exact study of the old Asiatic Yoga-texts in their original language, we know that the semen, which is to flow backwards and upwards, does not simply mean male sperm, and in the same way the breath, which is to be stored up "in the vessel of the body," does not mean simply physical air. In both cases it is rather the inner force of those substances that is meant, both of the liquids and of the wind in the human body. Besides this, the words and names of Yoga writings never refer to the "coarse body," but to the bodily sensations that belong to it.



6. THE ALCHEMISTIC ART OF HEALING

AN OLD CHINESE MANUSCRIPT has a sub-title called: "The art of prolonging human life."

This expresses the result that was expected from the reversal of the movements of nature in the human body. When the Marigold, the force of all forces within us, has been found, then everything will be "changed into gold"; it will be the finding of the "Philosophers' Stone" and the obtaining of the Elixir which heals all disease and gives immortality.

At all times and throughout the world men have tried to liberate themselves from the inexorable power of death. Actually they wanted to achieve the eternity of their lives, really complete immortality. But usually they satisfied themselves in practice with obtaining a temporary prolongation of earthly life – a postponement of death for a long time means almost as much for the simple consciousness as the conquest of death.

Since our Ego is bound to the body and our body consists of matter, immortality had to be found in the form of a substance and be administered to the body. Thus in

the old Babylonian Gilgamesh epic, the hero searches for the plant of immortality. He finally finds it after great struggles in his wandering in worlds beyond and in the dim past; then he loses the priceless plant on his return journey, through a little carelessness when bathing.

This means: Man can only temporarily enjoy the dream of immortality; it does not remain present for all time; it passes away and dissolves again into the ordinary things of everyday existence which unnoticeably draw us beneath their sway.

It is told of the Chinese Emperor, Shi-Hoang-Ti, in the 3rd century B. C., that he fitted out a whole fleet which he sent to the distant mythical Islands of the Blessed to fetch the plant of immortality. These islands, which are no longer accessible to men living today, lie in the farthermost part of the Eastern ocean. The houses and palaces of its inhabitants are made of purest gold and silver. But the fleet sent thither never returned.

Chinese alchemists still venerate today the old philosopher Lao-tse, their patron saint, about whom legend has woven itself. Lao-tse lived about 600 B. C. According to the writings of the alchemists, he achieved the highest substance of power in "Tao," of which it is said: "for him who obtains it, nothing is impossible." Lao-tse himself, so we are told, so far perfected himself in magic that he succeeded in obtaining immeasurable quantities of gold. He is said to have prolonged his own life to 1040 A. D. by his art, and then to have gone to the West in a cart drawn by blue oxen, to be born again in India as a Buddha.

The great Chinese Emperors, particularly, were supposed to have been experts in alchemy. It is said of Emperor Wu-ti (c. 100 B. C.), that he gathered dew that

had fallen from heaven in a shell, which a statue standing before his palace held in its hand. From this dew he prepared a drink of immortality by adding finely powdered precious stones. Similar "drinks of immortality," which obviously contained some strong poison, were responsible for the deaths of four Chinese emperors between the years 800 and 860 – alchemists had prepared them an Elixir of Life from sulphur and quicksilver, to which valuable pearls had been added.

In the oldest times it was exclusively plants from which attempts were made to obtain a life essence by pulverizing or brewing them; only in relatively late times were metallic substances melted and mixed in order to make the secret water of life, the aurum potabile, or drinkable gold.

We can clearly see this development of the alchemistic process in the Tibetan "Stories of the 84 Magicians." In the earlier tales it is said that the magician prepared the "Drink of Long Life" in the midst of a dense forest where he gathered the necessary plants. Later much money was required to make such an elixir; it had to be prepared in retorts, from quicksilver and all sorts of other metallic powders.

For a long time, so runs the last story, the rich Brahmana Vyali endeavoured in vain to prepare the elixir; he still lacked a certain substance which the recipe-books declared to be essential – a mysterious red berry. But he really did not understand how to interpret these occult prescriptions properly, and only accident revealed to him the secret hidden in them. Thus, when the mudra (woman co-operating with him in his Yoga practices) was taking a bath one day, she cut her finger. The red drops of blood that oozed out dropped into Vyali's medica-

ment, and in this way he succeeded in his great work! The drink that resulted gave the Brahmana and his mudra immortality, nay even the horse which was standing nearby and accidentally tasted some of the elixir, became immortal.

Afterwards, the same elixir also proved itself useful for ennobling metals and transforming them into gold. Usually, however, this practice is reversed, according to the prescription of the legendary Nagarjuna, of whom the following saying has come down to us:

"Quicksilver is always to be used with the body, as with metal; it has the same effects, whether it penetrates the body or metal. It should first be tried on metal, and then applied to the body."

The famous traveller Marco Polo reported in the 13th century about certain priests in southern India who had reached an age of 150 to 200 years, because they enjoyed a drink of quicksilver and sulphur twice a month.

That which was beyond the reach of heroes and rulers, the alchemist sought to achieve through his work. The Yogin, as an Eastern alchemist, sought to raise the secretions of his body that were filled with life-force, into a substance of higher rank by condensation and sublimation, so that finally his body, completely filled with such secretions and elixirs, would itself become a vessel of immortality, no longer belonging to this coarse world, but exalted to a higher and better level of reality.

The alchemist, the western Yoga practitioner, brewed and boiled acids and metals in his crucible in order to obtain a medicine which would overcome death. He was really not concerned with remedies for all kinds of diseases; what he really had in mind was something more – it was immortality itself as the unconditionally highest remedy.

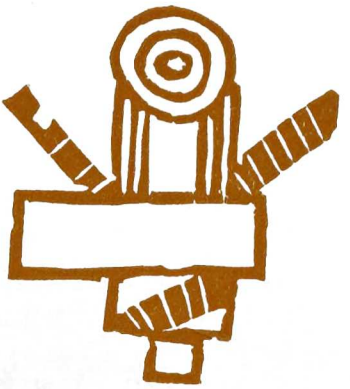
What the alchemist in fact achieved, were very many preparations which have partly been taken over into present-day pharmaceutical science as medicines. We must ask ourselves: How much of the old alchemistic striving has remained still alive today within the modern art of healing? Medical science on the one side, endeavours more and more to free itself from the old religious and occult ideas which have been branded as "superstition" and rejected. But on the other hand, doctors realize today that they have to reckon with the existing "superstitious" ideas of the people, that the alchemistic ideas are still widely alive even today and cannot be dismissed with a wave of the hand. Indeed, doctors even utilize them as a welcome means of suggestion; their healing power is by no means lessened by the fact that they ought actually to be ineffective if measured by purely chemical standards.

Apart from this, present-day medicine has clearly made great progress as compared with the old alchemy. The Tabula Smaragdina said that the fine should be separated from the coarse, "gently and sensibly." Strangely enough, however, it is just these clear words of the old hermetical prescription which have all too often been completely disregarded. The alchemistic process of the transformation of matter and its refinement into a finer being, usually took place in a manner which was truly anything but "suaviter," that is, loving, gentle and tender, and in which reason was only too often missing. Attempts were made to outrage nature often with an almost brutal lack of consideration, in order to force it to surrender its secrets and to acquire its forces for selfish use. Goethe makes Faust reject this sort of blackmailing of nature, with the following words:

"Unfathomably by light of day, Nature will permit no one to steal her veil . . . What to your spirit she will not reveal, with lever and screw you cannot wrest away."

The modern art of healing has also now come around to this view and no longer seeks to combat disease violently with dangerous poisons. It avoids the unnecessary hostility against existing conditions and lets Nature herself take control and complete the process of healing. "Gentleness" – this old hermetical prescription has become the watchword of the whole field of the modern science of curing nervous disorders.

In a corresponding manner the Asiatic world too has gradually turned away from the many unnatural features of certain Yoga-methods, and people there seek to conceive of themselves as a part of Nature, and in harmony with universal conditions.



7. THE PHILOSOPHERS' STONE

THE MAN WHO HAS RECOGNIZED his true nature in harmony with the laws of the celestial world above and with those of the world of earthly matter below, has found the Philosophers' Stone, for he now holds in his hands the key which will enable him to transform his Ego so that it may rise from out of its lethargy and delusion into divine life.

The alchemist looks at this development of his own soul in the mirror of material reactions, therefore he calls the real knowledge which he seeks to achieve, a stone. Basil writes the following verses about it:

"A stone will be found, it is not dear, from which a flickering fire is drawn, of which the stone itself is made, being composed of white and red; it is a stone and yet not a stone, Nature alone is active in it, causing a clear little spring to flow from it."

These lines are commented on in detail in a little book called "The Sun from the East," which first appeared in 1783, but the commentaries are difficult to understand for men of today. Therefore we shall try to explain the

above in the language of our own time.

"A stone will be found, it is not dear."

This first line means that the alchemists' raw material need by no means be a particularly precious, rare substance, but that any given conditions which we find at hand are sufficient in all circumstances as a point of departure. The reality of our soul and the world in which we have been placed, need not be purchased and acquired at great cost, even if it is, viewed from a higher plane, the most precious and the most noble thing to which we could ever attain.

"From which a flickering fire is drawn."

This means that reality around us bears in itself transforming-fire and that this fire leaps out to us flickeringly as soon as we recognize the spirit in which and through which the Universe exists. Just as the flint must already have borne within itself the sparks that fly from it when it is struck, so does our soul also contain the power for its own transformation and purification. We need not approach the world and the soul with external implements and strange powers in order to achieve the alchemistic process of purification.

"Of which the stone itself is made."

The power dormant in us for the exaltation of our own being is a part of our being. Existing reality which we use as a point of departure for all work, is no dead substance but conceals within itself the motive-power for transformation, or as the theologians express it – we have not to deal in this world with a reality that it peaceful within, but with a reality that is in ferment and is striving to rise above itself.

"Being composed of white and red."

This tells us more about the constituents of which our

world and our Ego consist. This existence is not a unity, but has arisen from the interaction of completely opposed forces. White and red, semen and blood must interact, in order to create a being; male and female do not produce the shape of worldly being until they are united. The alchemists express this by saying that the forces of the sun and the moon, or of the metals corresponding to them, must react together in order to achieve the Great Work and produce a new and transformed life.

In this way arises, from the mineral standpoint, the Philosophers' Stone; but from the spiritual standpoint, the result is the new man, the *homunculus*, as an *hermaphrodite*, who bears within himself the properties of male and female in equal proportions.

"It is a stone and yet not a stone."

This statement is intended to warn us from considering the world as we see it in everyday life, to be good and holy without more ado. It is true that it contains the sparks of the transforming fire, that its existence is in ferment; but only the holy glance of the higher man in us is capable of perceiving these forces in matter. The alchemists express this idea symbolically by calling the Stone "soft"; the Stone – the substance of this world of ours – is not quite hard and impenetrable, but on the other hand, neither is it liquid so as at all times, of itself as it were, to flow and change into the right forms. It is the task of men to give it form by alchemistic processes.

"Nature alone is active in it."

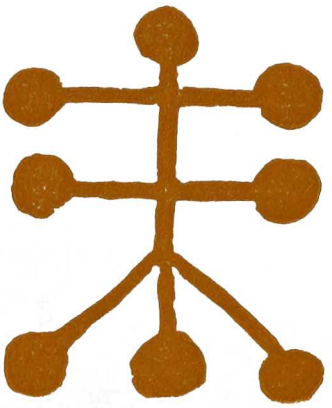
Even the alchemist in the end cannot do otherwise than let nature work in things. Everything that we undertake against nature must necessarily lead to evil. To this extent even the process of the purification and refinement of our existence into holy clarity and pure light is really

not accomplished by ourselves through our own power and free will; it is rather an objective process, which we can only bring to *consciousness* by all our doing and activity, and by the great alchemistic work.

"Causing a clear little spring to flow from it."

The stone that we have found is not intended to remain stone. It is intended to be fruitful in moulding the new and higher life. Just as water is drawn from the rock by striking it with the magician's wand, so must the newly acquired form of existence of transformed and purified man become a source of power for many. For attaining this, of course, a sacrifice is necessary, for as long as the stone is not broken it can let nothing stream out from itself. The alchemists therefore, usually speak of fermentation, even of decay and dissolution, which must set in before the highest form of the new life can be attained. We can most clearly express what is meant here by a quotation from the Bible:

"Verily, verily I say to you: except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world, shall keep it unto life eternal" (John 12: 24, 25).



8. THE DIFFERENT ELEMENTS

WHOEVER HAS ATTAINED the One Great Thing, no longer needs multiplicity. Whoever has obtained the Stone no longer needs the different elements, for the Stone is the most precious thing there can be, although it has apparently been produced from the meanest substance in the everyday world which lies to our hand.

In many fairy-tales we are told that in our search for the highest wisdom and the greatest treasures, we must not let ourselves be dazzled by rare precious things which lie piled up in the treasure caves, but that we must pass unwaveringly through all such enticements until we find the highest good in something that seems quite insignificant.

In the Turkish folk-lore book of the 40 Viziers, there is an alchemistic tale of this kind which runs as follows:

The famous Brahmana Padmanaba finds in Damascus the young son of an innkeeper, Hassan; he wins his love and wants to teach him his art. He conducts him outside the city to a spring of water. The Brahmana makes the water disappear with a paper inscribed with magic Indian

words. They descend a staircase and stand before a copper door, which opens inwards at a magic command. A monstrous Moor who is on guard behind it, is struck unconscious to the floor by the Brahmana, who utters a prayer and breathes on him. They then come to a crystal hall, the gates of which are guarded by two fire-breathing dragons. These also are rendered powerless by magic. The two then reach a second hall, entirely of rubies and carbuncles, in the entrance of which are six diamond female figures.

Passing through a marvellously decorated passage-way, they finally reach a room in whose four corners there are respectively, gold, rubies, a silver jug of water, and a small heap of black earth. In the middle, in a priceless coffin, lies the embalmed body of a king; a hieroglyphic inscription on a gold tablet contains a warning to onlookers. It is, as Hassan learns in answer to his questions, one of the old kings of Egypt, the builder of this subterranean vault. He possessed the Philosophers' Stone, and all the riches which astonish Hassan here have come from the heap of black earth lying in the corner. Hassan doubts this. The Brahmana answers: To prove it to you, I shall recite to you two Turkish verses which contain the whole secret of the Philosophers' Stone. They are as follows: "Betroth the bride of the West to the Prince of China; a child will come from them, the Sultan of beautiful countenance."

And further the Brahmana says: I shall explain to you the secret meaning of these words. Let the dry Adamas earth, the diamond-earth which comes from the East, be saturated with moisture; from this will arise the philosophic Mercury who is all-powerful in nature and who can produce the Sun and the Moon, that is, gold and silver,

and when he ascends the throne, then he will turn pebbles into diamonds and other precious stones.

The silver utensil which lies in one corner, contains water, that is, the moisture with which the dry earth was made wet, in order to change it into the condition in which it lies here. If you take merely a handful from this heap, then you will be able, if you wish, to change every metal in Egypt into silver or into gold, and every stone into diamonds or rubies.

"A stone is found"; it is found once and for all by the seeker in this seemingly insignificant black earth of everyday life. Usually however, the alchemists achieved it by much effort and great labour. They sought to produce artificially what nature herself offered to others freely and without effort.

Therein lies the difference between the direct and the indirect path which leads to purification. In most religions these two very differing methods are distinguished. Everywhere we see alongside those blessed people whom a god or simple nature herself granted the fullness of knowledge and wisdom, those others who seek to make their way to the sources of divine life in long and painful struggle amidst thousands of trials and tribulations. In the same way we find in the history of alchemy, alongside the few who could call the stone their own at any time, the many others who tried to prepare it by their experiments with matter.

From the numerous different elements, something was brewed which was supposed to possess the fullness of worldly existence in pure unity. Of white and red, it was believed, the stone had to be composed, of male and female. The new and higher being of forces and substances must arise from their "betrothal."

The metals were mixed; the names of the metals were applied to just those different sides of reality which had to combine in order to form, through their combination, a higher being. Quicksilver, sulphur and salt, so it was said, must be combined in the right proportions; this would produce the *lapis*, the Stone, as the crown of creation.

By quicksilver – mercury – was meant a liquid, spiritual being, the motive-force which is inherent in all substances. By sulphur, however, was meant the inner warmth and fiery force of all beings. And *sal* – salt – was the combining force in things, a negative principle, which causes all other energies to coagulate and condense.

The electron, an alloy of gold and silver, and the holiest of metals, was for a long time regarded as the highest of all substances, and the great saint, Thomas Aquinas, comments on the electron in the following words: "It indicates nothing else but our lord Jesus Christ, the mediator between God and man; the electron combines the virtues of gold with those of silver; the latter acquires a higher splendour, the former diminishes its own. In the same way in God's Son also, the nature of divinity is combined with our own; the latter acquires a higher splendour, the former moderates that of its majesty for our eye."

The male character of the sun and gold comes into contact in the electron with the female forces of the moon and silver. Even the different precious-stones, according to the alchemists, owed their value respectively to their content of male or female qualities. In general, the darker stones were regarded as male, the brighter as female. Most desired, however, were naturally those precious-stones which could be called "hybrid," because it was believed

that male and female characteristics were combined in them.

The art of producing such stones synthetically was already highly developed at a relatively early period. Books dealing with these practices are usually ascribed to the Egyptian queen Cleopatra, because she is regarded as the first prophetess of precious-stone alchemy.

It is said that Cleopatra once made a wager with the Roman general Mark Anthony who was her guest, as to which of them could prepare the most costly feast for the other. Anthony had a tremendously rich banquet prepared; the tables groaned beneath the burden of choice foods and dainties of rare kinds, and the number of dishes seemed to have no end. On the next day the Queen invited Anthony to her palace. But where were the tables and the dishes? In their stead Cleopatra seized a pearl of inestimable value, dissolved it before Anthony's eyes in a glass of vinegar and drank his health with it. In this way she completely defeated all Anthony's efforts and won the wager.

In the far-eastern world, also, the pearl is often used as the symbol of highest wisdom. The "gold-pearl" or "Marigold" had to be obtained and an elixir against death thereby achieved. Today in Chinese folklore, all sorts of precious stones and pearls are regarded as remedies or talismans. An old Chinese myth speaks of the "oil of precious-stones" which flows from inaccessible mountains, gradually coagulating for some 10,000 years and finally becoming the plant of immortality, which gives the happy possessor an almost eternal life.

9. THE PSEUDO-ALCHEMY OF THE CAULDRON-COOKS

HAD THE ALCHEMISTS SUCCEEDED in preparing pure gold, then the history of alchemy would not only have thereby been ended, but alchemy would have completely ceased to be what it had really been since its origin: the attempt to raise this whole world of ours to a higher form of existence by the transformation of matter.

The great initiates of alchemy, the "adepts" of the mysterious science, always knew this. In fact they treated the manufacture of gold as a thoroughly uninteresting side line, and therefore only spoke of gold-making in order to mislead the uninitiated.

What significance would it have had, if men had finally succeeded after much effort in producing real gold? According to the Ancients, even animals understood how to produce gold. An Arabic book of about 900 speaks of gold-digging ants as large as cats, living in East Africa.

All the mixing and heating of substances in retorts has at the most a preparatory value; it can serve at best as an introduction for the student before he can be initiated into the deeper and actual secrets of true alchemy. If,

however, this external activity is elevated to being the main thing, then this must lead to a grotesque misunderstanding of hermetical science.

This misunderstanding explains the various groups of erring alchemists who were always vigorously rejected by the true adepts as "pseudo-alchemists" or "cauldron-cooks" and were often despised. All "metallists," who hoped to find the stone by melting and mixing different metals, are on the wrong path. Equally mistaken are the "mineralists," who want to prepare from acids and salts the "universal solvent," in which all substances without exception will disslove and thereby surrender their own individuality.

To these belong also the "refining-water cooks" who wanted to transmute silver into gold by the essences they brewed.

The "air-fishermen," on the other hand, hoped to be able to inhale the fundamental substance in the form of an astral salt on spring nights. They took little bottles with them into which they breathed this valuable air. They then dropped water into the bottle, in order to prepare the "virginal milk" and to transform this into "virginal earth," which "hovered over the head and had never yet been trodden by the foot of man."

The old writings mention further: spittle-gatherers, scavengers, urine-boilers and dung-searchers. For centuries there existed the so-called "filth-pharmacy," in which most of the medicines were prepared from the excrement of men or animals.

The Neapolitan Santanelli described a century ago a recipe for making a panacea for various diseases. According to this, blood must be fermented and then allowed to dry. Then it is put into a blown bird's egg and placed

under a brooding hen. In the same time taken by birds to develop in the egg and creep out, the desired stone is also brought to completion in this uniform, mild heat, and it can be used for all cures imaginable.

Others, again, sought to obtain the stone from semen, or made herbal extracts, thinking that they could distill the essence of life from the green floating on the surface of ponds – "the green slime fallen from heaven."

If one tests the prescriptions of all these cauldron-cooks, then one must always admit, perhaps to one's own astonishment, that there is something good in most of them. There is a kernel of truth in it all; only the way, of course, in which all such practices were conducted was bizarre, as the language and expressions of the alchemists has everywhere been.

It has often been said that the unintelligible language of the alchemists and the repellent character of their cooking, is merely a cunning form of concealing what was actually intended. In other words, the alchemists only put forward the names of metals, liquids and plants in order to conceal something quite different. Gold and quicksilver, diamonds and dung, blood and sweat, were all only names intended to keep secret the real alchemistic process from intruding laymen.

This certainly had been the intention of the alchemists. Usually, however, they themselves had implicit belief in their practices as they describe them to us. They are precisely for each one the path of sublimation destined and suitable for him.

Alchemy, as we saw, has indeed the characteristic that the transformation of the whole spiritual and bodily world of men must take place in it. Therefore it is always concerned with matter, and with the momentary com-

pletion of a detail in the treatment of matter. It is quite characteristic of alchemy that in the end one really believed salvation and holiness could be secured by cooking strange metallic stews.

What does it matter, if in the process, one remained caught up in the details of material reality and in very limited spheres? The entire and complete all-sidedness of existence, the eternal unity of all substances and forces, and the highest wisdom of mystic vision are inaccessible to us anyway, in our limited human form. If we wish to attain it and so raise ourselves completely above petty details, then we must of course, first change ourselves into beings of a different kind. We would have to cast off all our limited, specialized and individualized egoistic being. We would have to surrender our lower Ego, in order to acquire a higher Self.

But this would no longer be the indirect path, but the "direct path" of the higher initiates.

10. THE DECLINE OF ALCHEMY THROUGH BECOMING INTELLIGIBLE

THE PHYSICIAN PARACELSUS and the mystic Jakob Boehme are the destroyers of alchemy, since in their writings they give the "real meaning" of alchemistic symbolism. An alchemy that is understood is no longer alchemy.

"Making a thing intelligible" means suiting it to the intelligence. But "intellect" is no original characteristic of man, but a capacity that has only recently been acquired in the cultural development of the human race. The period of innate intelligence was preceded by a mythical period in which man had a completely different and immediate access to the depths of reality.

Alchemy is the attempt to regain once more the magical conception of the world of the early period, on the soil of the newly-won higher consciousness. This attempt had prospects of success as long as its peculiar formulation and practices remained secret from the newly-awakened critical intelligence and was not subject to its disintegrating influence.

Therefore, taken historically, alchemy exists in a period

in which a change in the human attitude to the world takes place. It belongs to the various efforts of such times not to lose the old and the good completely. In such transition-periods there necessarily arises the need for keeping secret that treasure of knowledge which a few far-seeing men seek to save from the old form and carry over into the new.

Only those who are not quite sure of themselves and who doubt the power of truth in their knowledge, have this need for secretiveness, because they shrink from confessing their views openly and submitting them to the critical judgment of the spirit of the time. All secretiveness, all "occultism," arises from weakness, from the desire to preserve a disappearing knowledge. The occultist, the magician, wants to preserve something which really can no longer be preserved and which will also one day float away from him in the living stream of life to new shores. This is the tragedy of all magicians.

The more the newly awakening intelligence developed and the more critical it became, the more did magicians and occultists have to hide and cloak their treasure of knowledge. An "oath of secrecy inspiring horror and repulsion" had to be taken by everyone who wanted to be initiated into alchemistic practices. The whole system could be preserved from collapse only by an unbroken silence Wherever alchemistic doctrines were spread in word or writing, it was done by the use of "covering names," and only the initiated could guess the actual forces and substances that were meant.

In Paracelsus and Jakob Boehme the spirit of the new time awoke to life. It had not quite arrived; this is revealed in the numerous uncertain terms and unclarities in their language. The distinction between the higher alchemy

and the pseudo-alchemy of the cauldron-cooks is not yet clearly made by them. Therefore they sometimes condemn alchemy, and at other times they praise it in the highest terms.

Paracelsus and Boehme give to us of today the possibility of "understanding" alchemy, because they tell us in detail what "really" lay behind all those strange experiments and what their purpose "really" was. But whoever has in this way discovered a meaning in practices and cults and ceremonials of any kind, is no longer in the habit of practicing such cults himself. An "explained" or rationalized ceremony is no longer a ceremony.

The old alchemists, too, knew of a way of overcoming alchemistic practices by a still higher intuition. They rightly placed alongside the "indirect path" of the transformation of matter, the "direct path" of mystic vision which did not lead to the height of intuition by the roundabout way of moulding material existence.

This distinction between the direct and the indirect path is the same as we find in India, between Raja-Yoga and Hatha-Yoga. The one, here as well as there, is purely a step to the other, and is completely removed and finished with as such, as soon as the higher path is reached. And for most, such a preparatory precedure is indispensable, even although the last step on the way to the highest illumination can no longer be described as a step, but can only be achieved by a jump.

But we must beware of believing that all those who reject and ridicule alchemy, have already in its place attained to the higher, direct path. Only he who feels himself inspired by a higher power, and with this consciousness feels himself already liberated from the shortcomings of the lower world, is justified in setting aside,

as far as he himself is concerned, the forms and prescriptions of the indirect path. He no longer needs alchemistic practices, because the alchemistic process of transformation has been accomplished in him.

All others must beware of scorning a path by which, in times past, untold numbers have attained the purification of their soul, and with it, the transformation of their world.

The pictures and signs used in this book were taken from "The Book Raziel," an old cabalistic text, first printed in Amsterdam in 1701. Set in 12 point Janson type. 250 copies were printed at the Greenwood Press of San Mateo, California.

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Spiegelberg, Frederic.

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